

I Ain't Got No Home

Recorded in 1940, this song captures the hardships of Dust Bowl refugees during the Depression Era.

I ain't got no home, I'm just a-roamin' 'round,
Just a wandrin' worker, I go from town to town.
And the police make it hard wherever I may go
And I ain't got no home in this world anymore.

My brothers and my sisters are stranded on this road,
A hot and dusty road that a million feet have trod;
Rich man took my home and drove me from my door
And I ain't got no home in this world anymore.

Was a-farmin' on the shares, and always I was poor;
My crops I lay into the banker's store.
My wife took down and died upon the cabin floor,
And I ain't got no home in this world anymore.

I mined in your mines and I gathered in your corn
I been working, mister, since the day I was born
Now I worry all the time like I never did before
'Cause I ain't got no home in this world anymore

Now as I look around, it's mighty plain to see
This world is such a great and a funny place to be;
Oh, the gamblin' man is rich an' the workin' man is poor,
And I ain't got no home in this world anymore.

Sources

Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (n.d). *I ain't got no home. Lyrics*. Retrieved March 11, 2021, from https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/I_Aint_Got_No_Home.htm

Woody Guthrie - Topic. (2015, September 24). *I ain't got no home in this world anymore* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUgzXJACXzs>

Union Maid

Written in 1940, this song references the organized labor unions that were created in the United States to protect the interests of workers.

There once was a union maid, she never was afraid
Of goons and ginks and company finks and the deputy sheriffs who made the raid.
She went to the union hall when a meeting it was called,
And when the Legion boys come 'round
She always stood her ground.

Oh, you can't scare me, I'm sticking to the union,
I'm sticking to the union, I'm sticking to the union.
Oh, you can't scare me, I'm sticking to the union,
I'm sticking to the union 'til the day I die.

This union maid was wise to the tricks of company spies,
She couldn't be fooled by a company stool, she'd always organize the guys.
She always got her way when she struck for better pay.
She'd show her card to the National Guard
And this is what she'd say

Oh, you can't scare me, I'm sticking to the union,
I'm sticking to the union, I'm sticking to the union.
Oh, you can't scare me, I'm sticking to the union,
I'm sticking to the union 'til the day I die.

You gals who want to be free, just take a tip from me;
Get you a man who's a union man and join the ladies' auxiliary.
Married life ain't hard when you got a union card,
A union man has a happy life when he's got a union wife.

Sources

Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (n.d). Union maid. Lyrics. Retrieved March 11, 2021, from https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Union_Maid.htm.

Arlo Guthrie - Topic. (2016, February 27). Union maid [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1g4ddaXRso>

I've Got To Know

Recorded in 1951, this song was written as the United States joined the Korean War and moves from critiquing war to the decisions made by those with political and economic power.

I've got to know, yes, I've got to know, friend;
Hungry lips ask me wherever I go!
Comrades and friends all falling around me
I've got to know, yes, I've got to know.

Why do your war boats ride on my waters?
Why do your death bombs fall from my skies?
Why do you burn my farm and my town down?
I've got to know, friend, I've got to know!

What makes your boats haul death to my people?
Nitro blockbusters, big cannons and guns?
Why doesn't your ship bring food and some clothing?
I've sure got to know, folks, I've sure got to know!

Why can't my two hands get a good pay job?
I can still plow, plant, I can still sow!
Why did your lawbook chase me off my good land?
I'd sure like to know, friend, I've just got to know!

What good work did you do, sir, I'd like to ask you,
To give you my money right out of my hands?
I built your big house here to hide from my people,
Why you crave to hide so, I'd love to know!

You keep me in jail and you lock me in prison,
Your hospital's jammed and your crazyhouse full,
What made your cop kill my trade union worker?
You'll hafta talk plain 'cause I sure have to know!

Why can't I get work and cash my big paycheck?
Why can't I buy things in your place and your store?
Why do you close my plant down and starve all my buddies?
I'm asking you, sir, 'cause I've sure got to know!

Sources

Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (n.d). I've got to know. Lyrics. Retrieved March 11, 2021, from https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Ive_Got_To_Know.htm.

Woody Guthrie - Topic. (2015, May 19). I've got to know [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_f1nlorvU0

Pastures of Plenty

Written and recorded in late April 1947, this song recounts the experience of migrant workers and fruit pickers in the West, whom Guthrie spent time with while touring the Columbia River.

It's a mighty hard row that my poor hands have hoed
My poor feet have traveled a hot dusty road
Out of your Dust Bowl and Westward we rolled
And your deserts were hot and your mountains were cold

I worked in your orchards of peaches and prunes
I slept on the ground in the light of the moon
On the edge of the city you'll see us and then
We come with the dust and we go with the wind

California, Arizona, I harvest your crops
Well its North up to Oregon to gather your hops
Dig the beets from your ground, cut the grapes from your vine
To set on your table your light sparkling wine

Green pastures of plenty from dry desert ground
From the Grand Coulee Dam where the waters run down
Every state in the Union us migrants have been
We'll work in this fight and we'll fight till we win

It's always we rambled, that river and I
All along your green valley, I will work till I die
My land I'll defend with my life if it be
Cause my pastures of plenty must always be free

Sources

Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (n.d). Pastures of plenty. Lyrics. Retrieved March 11, 2021, from https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Pastures_Of_Plenty.htm.

Woody Guthrie - Topic. (2015, June 23). Pastures of plenty [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQ5zA368EJs>

All You Fascists

Written in 1942 and performed on a 1944 radio broadcast with Sonny Terry, this song was a response to not only the fascism of Hitler and Nazi Germany during WWII but also issues much closer to home, such as racism, that plagued the United States.

I'm gonna tell you fascists
You may be surprised
The people in this world
Are getting organized
You're bound to lose
You fascists bound to lose

Race hatred cannot stop us
This one thing we know
Your poll tax and Jim Crow
And greed has got to go
You're bound to lose
You fascists bound to lose.

All of you fascists bound to lose:
I said, all of you fascists bound to lose:
Yes sir, all of you fascists bound to lose:
You're bound to lose! You fascists:
Bound to lose!

People of every color
Marching side to side
Marching 'cross these fields
Where a million fascists dies
You're bound to lose
You fascists bound to lose!

I'm going into this battle
And take my union gun
We'll end this world of slavery
Before this battle's won
You're bound to lose
You fascists bound to lose!

Sources

Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (n.d). All you fascists. Lyrics. Retrieved March 11, 2021, from https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/All_You_Fascists.htm

UnAmericanBandstand. (2009, January 4). Woody Guthrie - All you fascists bound to lose [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwcKwGS7OSQ>

Blinding of Isaac Woodard

Written in 1946, this song was inspired by the 1946 assault and blinding of Black World War II veteran Isaac Woodward in a South Carolina jail. Woody Guthrie performed this song at the Isaac Woodard benefit show at Lewisohn Stadium on Aug. 16, 1946, and later wrote, "I made this ballad up because we'll need lots of songs like this one before we win our fight for racial equality in our big free United States."

My name is Isaac Woodard, my tale I'll tell you;
I'm sure it'll sound so terrible you might not think it true;
I joined up with the Army, they sent me overseas;
Through the battles of New Guinea and in the Philippines.

On the 13th day of February of 1946
They sent me to Atlanta to get my discharge pin;
I caught the bus for Winslow, going to meet my wife,
Then we were coming to New York City to visit my parents both.

About an hour out of Atlanta, the sun was going down,
We stopped the bus by a drugstore in a little country town;
I walked up to the driver and I looked him in the eye;
"I'd like to go to the washroom if you think we got time".

The driver started cursing and then he hollered, "No!"
And then I cussed right back at him and really got him told.
He said, "If you will hurry, I guess I'll take the time",
It was in a few short minutes we was rolling down the line.

We rolled for thirty minutes, I watched the shacks and trees,
Thinking of my wife in Winsboro waiting there for me.
In Aiken, South Carolina the driver he jumped out;
He came back with a policeman to take me off the bus.

"Listen Mister Policeman", I started to explain,
"I did not cause no trouble and I did not raise no cain."
He struck me with his billy, he cursed me up and down,
"Shut up, you black bastard"; and he walked me down in town.

As we walked along the sidewalk, my right arm he did twist;
I knew he wanted me to fight back, but I never did resist.
"Have you your Army Discharge?" I told him, yes, I had;
He pasted me with his loaded stick down across my head.

I grabbed his stick and we had a little run, and had a wrestle;
When another cop run up with a gun and jumped into the battle;
"If you don't drop that sap, black boy, it's me that's dropping you."
I figured to drop that loaded sap was the best thing I could do.

They beat me about the head and face and left a bloody trail
All down along the sidewalk to the iron door of the jail;
He knocked me down upon the ground and he poked me in the eyes;
When I woke up next morning, I found my eyes were blind.

They drug me to the courtroom, and I could not see the judge;
He fined me fifty dollars for raising all the fuss.
The Doctor finally got there but it took him two whole days;
He handed me some drops and salve and told me to treat myself.

It's now you've heard my story, there's one thing I can't see,
How you can treat a human like they have treated me.
I thought I fought on the islands to get rid of their kind;
But I can see the fight lots plainer now that I am blind.

Source

Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (n.d). Blinding of Isaac Woodard. Lyrics. Retrieved March 11, 2021, from https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Blinding_of_Isaac_Woodard.htm.

Talking Centralia

Recorded in 1947, this song was written after the March 1947 Centralia No. 5 coal mine disaster. The coal mine, near Centralia, Illinois, exploded, killing 111 people.

I'm just a miner in a mining town
I dig like a mole in a hole in the ground
When the sun comes up til the sun goes down
I don't see much sun when I'm down in the ground

Soft coal and hard coal and lead and zinc and all other kinds of hard stuff
It's a hard living.

Got up this morning in the same old way
Dropped my hot coffee to start off my day
My wife give me breakfast in her stocking feet
And I kissed the kids in bed and then I walked down the street

Just walking along watching the sun come up, I was just thinking and wondering
Wondering and thinking.

Centralia here is a pretty little town
You can see Illinois for miles around
Can't see too good with my eyes full of sleep, though
I'm gonna quit mining someday and I'm gonna sleep 'bout a week

Just solid sleep
Hard down, hard up
Good old warm sleep

Dream myself up a lot of pretty dreams
About pretty mine holes and pretty mine bosses
And pretty mine owners and pretty women all over the place

Most men don't talk what's eatin' on their minds
About different ways of dying down here in the mines
But every morning we walk along and joke
About the mines caving in, the dust and the smoke

And one little wild spark of fire
Blowing us sky high and crooked
One little spark blowing us cross-eyed and crazy
Up to shake hands with all the Lord's little angels

Well, I knock at the gate and stand and laugh
And the elevator man drops us down his shaft
We scatter and kneel and crawl different places
With fumes in our eyes and dust on our faces

Gas on our stomach and water on our kneecap,
Aches and pains and rheumatism, all kinds of crazy pictures flying through our heads
Well, a spark did hit us in the number five
I don't know if anybody ever did come out alive
I got carried out with a busted head
The lady said there's a hundred and eleven was dead

Well, this ain't my first explosion
I come through two cave-ins and two more fires before this one
Twenty-two dead down in Ohio and thirty-six I seen in Kentucky laid up
And a hundred and eleven here in Centralia

Well, it seems like the very best men go down
And don't come back in these mining towns
Keep on a-wondering how things would be
If a cave-in had come to the senator's seat

Or a big explosion of some kind was to go off up there in them Congress walls
Wonder what sort of words and messages that they'd write on their slates
Wonder if they'd hire anybody to come down to them Senate chambers and put in some safety
devices,
Nine hundred dollars worth

Think there's just about enough loose gas around that Capitol dome up there, though
To make a mighty big blow if a spark ever hits it just right

Sources

Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (n.d). *Talking Centralia*. Lyrics. Retrieved March 11, 2021, from
https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Talking_Centralia.htm.

Woody Guthrie - Topic. (2015, May 19). *Talking Centralia (Talking miner)* [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGGJe8pAwkw>